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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 VATICAN 000240

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/21/2016
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [NU](#) [CU](#) [MX](#) [VT](#)
SUBJECT: HOLY SEE: MARTINO DISCUSSES NICARAGUA, SECURITY WALL WITH
AMBASSADOR

REF: A. A) VATICAN 0213

[B](#). B) VATICAN 0225

[C](#). C) VATICAN 0233

VATICAN 00000240 001.2 OF 003

CLASSIFIED BY: Peter G. Martin, Political Officer, Political,
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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

[1](#). (C) Cardinal Renato Martino (please strictly protect here) told the Ambassador November 16 that the Holy See had attempted to get Cardinal Obando y Bravo out of Nicaragua in the run-up to the recent elections, but that Obando y Bravo had not acted on the Vatican's "invitation" for him to come to Rome. Martino stood by his recent criticism of the proposed U.S. security wall on the Mexican border, and called for greater U.S. communication with Syria and Iran. He also touched on several other issues of general interest to the U.S. Martino shows no signs of relenting in his perpetual media campaign; Post remains engaged with the cardinal in an attempt to influence him and the headlines he creates. End summary.

Nicaragua

[2](#). (C) The Ambassador called on Cardinal Renato Martino November 16 to discuss recent comments the cardinal had made to the press and other current events. Martino is President of both the Holy See's Council for Justice and Peace, and the Council for Migrants and Itinerant Peoples. Martino (strictly protect here) told the Ambassador that the Holy See had called Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo to Rome during the pre-election period, but hadn't succeeded in getting him out of Nicaragua. [Comment: though it didn't stop Obando y Bravo, it was good to hear that the Vatican had heeded our call to try to minimize the

cardinal's lobbying for Ortega in the run-up to the elections (ref a). Martino didn't go into detail, but was clearly disgusted with Obando y Bravo's behavior, calling the whole situation "sad".

Mexican Border Wall

13. (C) Martino made headlines November 14 when he criticized the U.S.'s proposed security wall during a scheduled speech. The Ambassador told Martino that when considering the security wall, it would be wise to look at the broader context of U.S. immigration policies -- and President Bush's continuing strong efforts to promote comprehensive immigration reform. Martino noted that his written text had not singled out the United States and had been more generally critical of walls separating peoples. He did not back down, however, from his response to a question at the press conference, in which he termed the proposed U.S. wall "inhumane". In conversations with Martino's staff we have noted that whatever one thinks of the proposed security wall, it is misleading to liken it to the Berlin Wall, and also unfair to compare a wall on the border of a sovereign country to walls separating peoples internally, such as a much-criticized wall in Padova (Northern Italy) that separated a high-crime immigrant neighborhood from its neighbors.

Cuba

14. (C) Often criticized within and outside of the Roman Curia for being too sympathetic to Castro, Martino told the Ambassador he agreed with the common consensus that the dictator would not live much longer. He repeated his well-known opposition to the U.S. embargo, and said he thought the sentiment among the American people on Cuba policy was changing. He noted a recent trip he had taken to Miami during which he had noticed that the younger generation of Cuban Americans was not as hard-line on Castro as he said the older generation was. Martino said he hoped that when the island opened up again the U.S. would be ready to engage, because there would be "many others" already on the ground. The Ambassador noted relevant points on U.S. Cuba policy, some of which we heard during the recent visit to the Vatican of WHA DAS Madison (ref b).

Middle East

15. (C) Conversation did not turn to Martino's recent comments criticizing the death-penalty sentence for Saddam (ref c), but the Ambassador and Martino did discuss the Middle East generally. The cardinal said that during a recent trip he had urged the UK government to involve Syria and Iran as much as possible as it addressed conflicts in the region. He asked the USG to do the same. The Ambassador noted that the administration had not ruled out speaking with the Iranians and other parties under certain conditions, and was working hard on issues involving Syria and Iran in the broader context of the

international community.

Africa

¶6. (C) Martino said he had raised what he saw as the West's lack of attention to Africa on his UK trip. He said he had been struck by economic inroads that the Chinese had made on the continent, and also feared advances by Al Qaeda in the region. According to Martino, if the West doesn't focus on Africa soon, it will be "too late."

Bonds

¶7. (SBU) In response to a question from the Ambassador, Martino showed off his freshly-purchased multi-government bond supporting a campaign to immunize 500 million children in the world's poorest countries. The bonds project hopes to raise \$4 billion over the next decade and the eight sponsoring countries, including France, Italy, Spain and Great Britain, have pledged enough money over the next 20 years to redeem the bonds with interest. The cardinal was optimistic about the future of the program, which is also supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Comment

¶8. (C) Martino is always eager to weigh in with the media, and has usually allowed himself a liberal definition of his Vatican competencies when doing so. Justice and Peace is already a wide-ranging department, covering war and peace issues, trade, social justice, and other topics. Now that he is dual-hatted as the chief of the Vatican's Council for Migration, Martino has still more topics as potential targets. It isn't that his opinions are usually that far out of sync with those of his Vatican colleagues; a majority of them, for example, would criticize the proposed U.S. border wall. But his strong language and occasionally overdrawn comparisons cause a great stir, and are often reported as "Vatican" views. As a result, observers often get a mistaken impression of what Holy See policy makers really think, and the nuances of their positions. His comment (during the same speech referenced above) that the problem of human trafficking today is "worse than" the African slave trade, was typical of Martino. His desire for the headlines added a distraction to his laudable attention to that issue. By staying engaged with Martino we hope to influence him, along with the substantial media attention he inevitably attracts.
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